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SUBJECT: SOUTH AFRICA: NGO'S CONSIDER CYCLE OF CRIME AND  
HOW TO BREAK IT

REF: PRETORIA 2037

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Summary  
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[¶1.](#) The cycle of crime plaguing South Africa has been documented by two recent surveys of young people -- showing they are victimized at even higher rates than adults (reftel), and this can lead to their own violent behavior. Looking for ways to break the cycle, the surveys identified factors related to schooling, family, community, and peers which enable some respondents to refrain from crime and transcend their violent upbringings. Progressive prevention strategies have been built into in new SAG legislation, and the SAG has funded NGO community initiatives to eliminate root causes of crime. Civil society groups worry, however, that the public outcry over crime has put pressure on the SAG to adopt a hard-line posture of heavy-handed law enforcement, rather than one promoting long-term social change. End Summary.

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Links From Victimization to Perpetration  
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[¶2.](#) The notion of a cycle of crime, in which early exposure leads to later offending, is corroborated by the 2008 Youth Lifestyle Survey conducted by the Center for Justice and Crime Prevention (CJCP). The survey documents the high rates at which 12 to 22-year-old South Africans are victims of violence and crime (reftel), and it demonstrates how such victimization in turn correlates to anti-social behavior. The figures below show clear associations between youths' experiences of crime and their own proclivities to violent behaviors: higher percentages of respondents who had themselves suffered crime now carried weapons, engaged in physical fighting, or threatened others with weapons.

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Correlation: Violent Experiences to Violent Behaviors  
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Percent who had (in prior year):

|                 | Carried<br>a weapon | Physically<br>in a fight | Threatened<br>/ hurt s.o.<br>with weapon |
|-----------------|---------------------|--------------------------|--|
| Family violence |                     |                          |  |
| - Yes           | 11.6                | 44.3                     | 5.9                                      |
| - No            | 4.4                 | 26.8                     | 1.4                                      |

Community violence

|                     |      |      |     |
|---------------------|------|------|-----|
| - Yes               | 7.5  | 40.6 | 2.9 |
| - No                | 2.9  | 16.7 | 0.8 |
| Ever been assaulted |      |      |     |
| - Yes               | 13.2 | 75.8 | 6.8 |
| - No                | 13.9 | 20.8 | 1.1 |
| Ever been robbed    |      |      |     |
| - Yes               | 12.5 | 49.1 | 6.2 |
| - No                | 4.4  | 26.4 | 1.4 |

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Source: CJCP National Youth Lifestyle Survey 2008  
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Resiliency: Overcoming One's Upbringing  
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¶3. In a companion study seeking ways to disrupt cycles of crime, CJCP probed why youth respond differently to common difficult backgrounds, some succumbing to criminality while others resist. CJCP's survey of Youth Resiliency to Crime compared two sets of respondents: an "offender" group of 395 young persons (aged 12-25) incarcerated for criminal offences, plus 233 of their parents /caregivers and 297 of their siblings; versus a "non-offender" group of 604 youths who had not committed crimes, plus their caregivers and who had not committed crimes, plus their caregivers and siblings, drawn for comparison from the same neighborhoods as the offenders. The survey sought so-called "resilience factors" which statistically are most predictive of youths' ability to transcend even the most crime-prone contexts.

¶4. The most potent forces keeping youth out of trouble with the law were schooling, non-violence in the family and

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community, peer behavior, and abstinence from alcohol and drugs. High school graduates, for example, were six times more likely to steer clear of committing crime than their non-graduate peers, and that multiple increased to 31 times among those who worked hard to get good grades. Respondents from homes where disputes were settled non-violently were seven times more likely to refrain from crime, and where punishment at home was not physical they were twice as likely to do so. Youths who had never themselves been victims of crime were six times more likely to behave lawfully, the same multiple as those whose best friends had never been arrested.

Young people who did not consume alcohol or drugs were four times more likely to resist other forms of crime. Females were 15 times more likely to stay out of trouble, in part because males are less adherent to resilience factors like schooling and more susceptible to risk factors like delinquent friends.

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SAG Policy: Prevention vs. Enforcement  
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¶5. Introducing the CJCP study at its September 29 launch, prominent youth rights advocate Dr. Ann Skelton noted that the resilience factors were striking in their simplicity but deceptively difficult to promote in practice. CJCP's findings were common-sensical and "in a sense, obvious": violence breeds violence, as can corporal punishment in lieu of reasoning; non-violent law-abiding role models are vital; and school and family are key socializing contexts (evidenced by the spike in crime at age 18 when youths finish school and leave home). Prevention paradigms had been enshrined in recent SAG laws, like the Child Justice Act (aiming for rehabilitation over punishment of young offenders) and the Children's Act (allowing for family interventions by social workers). Dr. Skelton worried, however, that the SAG was rushing to address symptoms of crime -- through metal detectors, barbed-wire fences, and police on campus to ensure

school safety -- without parallel "deeper thinking" on its underlying drivers.

¶6. In a September 25 meeting, CJCP Executive Director Patrick Burton said the Resiliency Survey underscored the limits of policing alone, and of a SAG trend toward heavy-handed law enforcement. Enlightened SAG policymakers were beginning to shift thinking from a reactive to a proactive footing, funding preventative social work alongside police repressive force -- but this was an uphill argument in the face of mounting political pressure to wage war on crime.

The SAG's first National Crime Prevention Strategy (NCPS) drafted in 1996 under Nelson Mandela was oriented to prevention and alleviating crime's root causes, said Burton, but this approach was scrapped in the Mbeki administration under Police Commissioner Jackie Selebi's crackdown on crime.

In conjunction with President Zuma's recent endorsement of expanded police authorities, the name change of the Department of Safety and Security to the Department of Police reflects the ascendancy of a harder line approach. Voices like that of the Western Cape's provincial Police Commissioner Mzwandile Petros, whom Burton said "objects to having it all distilled down to statistics," were at risk of being drowned out by a growing emphasis on enforcement.

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NGO Initiatives in Crime Prevention  
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¶7. In meetings with Cape Town NGOs and academics, poloff  
Q7. In meetings with Cape Town NGOs and academics, poloff learned of a range of local interventions aimed to curb violence and crime. As an example, the Department of Social Development has compensated for its acute shortage of government social workers by outsourcing some of its violence prevention commitments under the new Children's Act to a group known as RAPCAN (for Resources Aimed at the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect). At communities' invitation, RAPCAN leads workshops addressing historical traumas absorbed over decades of apartheid and beyond, teaching empathy and the channeling of rage, and confronting and changing male attitudes toward violence. In high schools RAPCAN runs seminars on coping skills as alternatives to violence, and in homes they teach programs in parenting. (Note: Executive Director Christina Nomdo extended an open invitation to emboffs discreetly to observe such a community dialogue. End Note.) RAPCAN cites the success story of the New World Foundation, a center operating since 1980 in the Cape's once gang-ridden Lavender Hill, which overcame local gangsterism through community dialogue.

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COMMENT: Quick Fix vs. Long Haul  
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¶8. South Africa's extraordinarily high rates of violence and crime demand both an urgent step-up in policing and long-term prevention strategies. The former is certainly needed to overcome the prevailing impunity enjoyed by illegal actors, and its potential for quantifiable results is appealing to politicians who wish to be seen to be fighting crime, but it can be superficial in addressing symptoms, rather than the root causes of crime and violence. By contrast, preventative interventions are long and hard -- indirect but fundamental, reshaping social and cultural dynamics and disrupting intergenerational patterns through extensive counseling work in communities, schools, and even individual homes. These interventions do not bear fruit in the five years of a single administration. It is encouraging to hear that the SAG is funding NGO interventions for the long term, in accordance with Mandela's 1996 vision -- but judging by recent headlines of "shoot to kill" policies, we remain concerned that the Zuma administration of 2009 may tilt toward the quick fix.  
End Comment.

